

From the author
THE

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PAINLESS EXTINCTION OF LIFE

IN

ANIMALS DESIGNED FOR HUMAN FOOD.

BY

HENRY MACCORMAC, M.D.

ADDRESSED TO THE

ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO
ANIMALS.

He who has no response for the cry of Nature in anguish is no true man.

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ON THE
PAINLESS EXTINCTION OF LIFE
IN ANIMALS DESIGNED FOR HUMAN FOOD.

No one, I should hope, will be inclined to contest that the extinction of life in animals designed for human food should be as painless as possible. The poor dependent brute is placed entirely at our disposal. We are called upon by every motive, human and Divine, to inflict upon him no needless or avoidable suffering. Very many have interested themselves with the welfare of the brute, principally, however, in regard to his treatment during life. Few have the immediate opportunity, and fewer still care to dive into the painful mysteries of the slaughterhouse. Not many, therefore, have exerted themselves, directly or indirectly, to lessen the sufferings of the brute in death. The subject is repulsive. It is withdrawn from public gaze, and even the most humane persons have not ventured to interfere in a matter which was hardly deemed remediable.

It was a great advance when, some time since in Paris and more recently in London, slaughterhouses were removed from these respective capitals. This step still remains to be followed up universally. I would call upon the Legislature to interdict all slaughterhouses in towns. It is not right or proper

to overdrive the poor brute, to suffer the gutters of our towns to run with gore, and animals to be put to death in the vicinity of, nay in, the very shops where their flesh is sold.

Persons should be licensed to slay animals properly. It ought not to be tolerated that every incompetent or half competent fellow should flesh his gory axe or prentice hand without proper control and direction, at the cost of the suffering creatures whose frames we allow ourselves to appropriate for the better sustentation of our own.

Some short time ago the humanity of the public was shocked at the accounts published of vivisections. But all the horrors, real or alleged, of vivisection sink into nothingness contrasted with those of the slaughterhouses which yet abound all over the land. Our mode of killing animals is still as barbarous as it was in the darkest ages, is yet as savage as among any savages.

Attempts have been made by what is called *pithing*, also by the insufflation of air or water into the pleural cavities so as to hinder the lungs from acting, to lessen the pangs of the expiring brute. Pithing, when properly performed, puts a speedy end to life. But a slight movement on the part of the animal to be sacrificed, or any want of skill on the part of the operator, lessens the certainty of the trenchant blade reaching the spinal marrow through the restricted triangular space at the nape of the neck by which it is alone accessible. Blowing air into the jugular vein, and forcing air, water, or other fluid into the cavity outside the lung by a

sharp pointed tube, to which the bag of fluid is attached, thrust in between the fifth and sixth ribs, though perfectly efficient as methods of destruction, require considerable skill to perform, and, taking into account the character of the operation, the coercion to which the impatient animal would have to be subjected, and the more or less protracted preliminaries, would, I conceive, entail as great or even greater suffering than any of the methods already in use.

Under these circumstances, I come forward with a proposal to render the parting of life to the creatures which we require for our use, if not absolutely painless, at least as nearly painless as it is possible to imagine. The act of dying, I affirm, may be rendered painless, or next to painless, while the preliminaries need entail no bodily suffering of any kind. At the same time, I do not expect that the community at large will at once abandon its time honored customs at my suggestions. I, therefore, do not appeal to butchers or their ordinary customers only, but to the humane and intelligent, in particular to those who feel and know that God has not handed over his brute creation to us except on the tacit but not less binding condition that we should work them no avoidable ill.

I cannot tell, I am sure, why no one, so far as I am aware, before now seems to have entertained the humane idea of putting animals designed for human food to death by means of carbonic acid gas, except that the first origin and growth of all useful ideas are slow. And yet the fact that carbonic acid gas

takes away animal life speedily and even painlessly has long been well known; nay, was continually pressed, as it were, upon men's attention by the terrible casualties ensuing in consequence of persons falling into brewers vats and other receptacles charged, either through nature's operations or man's intervention, with the gas in question.

When in early life I was a student under Dupuytren, the great surgeon of his day, at the Hôtel Dieu, in Paris, the poor women, many of them, who kept stalls for the sale of fruit and other provisions in the public markets, were brought in, burnt dreadfully, and yet unconsciously, while in the trance or insensibility occasioned by the gases, the carbonic acid and carbonic oxide, namely, which issued from the little *chaufferettes*, or braziers filled with burning charcoal which the poor creatures were wont to place between their feet in order to ensure warmth during the severe winter chills. They fell asleep, unconsciously, as it were, narcotised by the gases I have named, and in this state, unless haply rescued in time, their clothes taking fire from the incandescence of charcoal, often incurred the most frightful burns I ever beheld. I questioned many of these poor victims on the subject, but one and all they severally assured me that never had they experienced the slightest pain. Of course, it will be understood that I speak of pain as inflicted during the period in which the injury was incurred.

The extinction of life in small animals, as dogs, has long been performed as a sort of exhibition at the Grotta del Cane, therefore so named, at Lake

Agnano, nigh Naples. With this property it would seem Pliny was well acquainted, since he has adverted to it in his Natural History. In modern times the circumstance has engaged the attention of various naturalists, and it has long been ascertained that carbonic acid gas is the agent at work. But although the period of nigh two thousand years, and perhaps yet more, has elapsed since this property, as attaching to carbonic acid, first attracted notice, it has never hitherto led to any practical inference or result. In England the sacrifice of human life from falling into brewers vats takes place from time to time, it is detailed any time these past hundred years in the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, say, but it has occurred to no one during that long period to liberate animals, oxen, sheep, pigs, fowl, and even fish, as eels now so hard to kill, designed for food, from the cruel inflictions to which they are so commonly subjected, by means of the agent which acts so painlessly on man. It is not long, I confess, since the thought of its great applicability in the case of the inferior animals occurred to me, and I earnestly submit that the suggestion is one which should not be made in vain.

On Wednesday, the 25th of March, 1863, a boy named Dewey, at Sion Brewery, Southsea, mounted on a forty barrel vat, and while looking through the man-hole, fell among some wet hops, and speedily became a victim to the carbonic acid gas which emanated from them. The engineer, finding what had taken place, descended by a rope ladder, and forthwith became senseless. Another man, although

cautioned, also descended, and shared the fate of those who had preceded him. The vat was then broken open, and the lifeless bodies were removed.

On the 21st of August of the same year, an inquest was held at the Five Bells, Bromley, on the person of George Briggs, who had ventured through a man-hole into a large vat in order to stir up the waste liquor and solids. No sooner had he gone down than he cried out, although he had tested the vat by a candle previously, there is gas here, and instantly fell back dead.

About three or four days since, some miles out of Belfast, a young man ascended a chimney in order, by means of a wet sack, to extinguish a burning flue. While in the act of doing so, he inhaled the gases, the carbonic acid and carbonic oxide, which issued from the burning chimney. In an instant, as if struck by lightning, the poor young man lost his foothold and rolled over quite dead. The awful promptness and rapidity with which these so frightful casualties ensue, and accounts of which I might recite by hundreds, prove the sure and certain efficacy and supreme fitness of the terrific agency I have adverted to for the object I have named. The very suddenness of its operation seems to preclude all pain. The persons acted upon do not appear to suffer. And the few who have been rescued declare uniformly that they knew nothing, felt nothing.

These occurrences, time after time, are related in the journals of the day, and like events, I have heard of them from my childhood, generation after

generation, have been detailed in other journals without leading to any desirable result. Now, the useful, the all desirable inference which I would draw, and whose adoption in action I would so strenuously urge, is the painless extinction of life through the instrumentality of carbonic acid gas, as regards animals that are designed as food for man.

I conceive, and would fain hope, that the simple publication of this proposal will induce the proper action, and lead to the universal adoption of a procedure so simple, painless, and effective, a procedure whose undesigned efficacy, as I have shown, has so often been tested at so much cost and so many sacrifices in the ease of our own species. I cannot see a colour of objection to it. I see everything, on the contrary, in its favor. The frightful scenes of the slaughterhouse, so repugnant to all right feeling and sense of humanity, would come to an end, and the animals designed for human subsistence would be bereft of life almost without a suffering or a pang. They need never see or smell the slaughterhouse, for the lower animals, as I have more than once observed, entertain as great an aversion for the sight or scent of blood as we do ourselves. They will not, if they can avoid it, even pass the spot where it has been shed. Of course I confine my remark to animals designed for the sustentation of man.

Some persons may, perhaps, entertain an objection to the flesh of animals that have not been bled. But the abstraction of the blood, if desired, may as readily be effected after death by the process which

I advocate as when it is taken away in the usual manner. I would, however, most strongly urge the discontinuance of the blood loss altogether. The blood is as wholesome and digestible as any portion of the flesh of animals, and there is no way in which it can so readily be made use of as by leaving it in the tissues wherein it subsists in life. The practice of bleeding animals entails a certain loss of from five to ten per cent. of otherwise available human food material. Some blood would, indeed, be lost unless otherwise made use of, I mean that which is lodged in the great vessels and cavities of the heart. But this loss would prove comparatively immaterial. In animals that are bled to death, first the large vessels are emptied, then the small, the meat fibre is blanched and impoverished, becomes at once less succulent, juicy, and wholesome; in a word, less nourishing and less digestible. It is quite a prejudice that proscribes the use as food of blood. Flesh, in fact, is nothing but the blood solidified, nor is it better fitted for the food of man than the blood itself. The recommendation that animals should be well bled is merely a butcher's prejudice, and undeserving of the slightest attention. I appeal to any one who has partaken, as most of us have done, of the flesh of animals that have been destroyed by the hunter instead of being butchered and bled, such as venison, winged game, and even horned cattle, whether the meat was not almost invariably more succulent tender and digestible than that which had passed through the butcher's hands. Game, however, it may be alleged, is more agreeable as

game, the flesh more animalised, higher flavoured. No doubt it is so. Nevertheless, this greater agreeability, this higher animalisation, and this superior flavor, are all to a large, if not the entire extent, ascribable to the circumstance of the blood being for the most part left in the tissues of the various kinds of meats instead of being drained out of them. The butcher's prejudice about well bled meat is one which they have imbibed from their superiors, and has no colour of support, whether in reason or fact.

The new method which I propose for taking away life in the case of animals, large or small, designed for the table, is simple in the extreme. A carbonic acid gas generator of suitable dimensions, fed with a little chalk and sulphuric acid, must be had to hand. The sort of generator made use of by the soda water manufacturers would answer every purpose, even on the largest scale. The gas might be conducted by a pipe or duct into a stone or wooden reservoir or chamber, for carbonic acid gas is so much heavier than air, where the animal should be led. Even gas mixed with air would suffice. No sooner should the line of the gas rise above the level of the zone of respiration than, as in the case of the poor stall women of Paris, the Grotta del Cane, or the brewer's vat, the animal would at once fall prostrate and insensible, and, without experiencing any appreciable pain or suffering, expire.

A sort of india-rubber hood or bag could otherwise be adjusted to the creature's head, and, when so adjusted, the gas might be led on by a treadle pressed by the operators foot. The instant the gas should

surround the respiratory outlets, the animal's consciousness would cease. In order to prevent reanimation, the creature would have to be left a few minutes untouched, after which the butcher might resume his functions. In the name of universal humanity, and for the sake of the beings who share this world along with us, for he who has no response for the cry of nature in anguish is no true man, let this humane and painless procedure, which realizes a perfectly wholesome food without a shadow of risk to the operator, receive the attentive consideration to which the great importance of the subject so well entitles it.

